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EDUCATION

After failing, 1,425 get GED pass

By Bill Bush
The Columbus Dispatch

After criticism that the passage rate on the GED high school equivalency test had plunged, the for-profit company that has the monopoly on the test

has retroactively lowered the passing score, causing 1,425 Ohioans who failed the test over the past two years to be notified that they actually passed it.

"The GED test itself isn't changing," said Scott Salesses, state relationship

manager with GED Testing Service in Washington, D.C. "The test measures critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and that doesn't change at all. We simply adjusted the passing score."

But even with the lower passing score, down

to 145 from 150 on a scale of 200, the number of Ohioans passing the test remains at a historic low. Before the change, 3,699 people in the state passed the test last year, down from more

SEE GED, A5



Regina Martin, 26, works on a math problem during a GED class at Columbus State. After updates made to the GED tests in 2014, far fewer test-takers passed. TOM DODGE/DISPATCH

GED

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than 15,000 in 2013, the year before the firm introduced a tougher, more expensive version of the GED test. Critics said the test was geared more to advanced college readiness than basic math and writing skills that could be used to help land a job.

Lowering the score added about 700 to the passing number last year, bringing it to around 4,400 — less than a quarter of the number who passed the test in 2013.

The decision to lower the passing score came after the company discovered that many students with GEDs were doing better on college-entrance exams than were those with high school diplomas, Saleses said.

“That’s great news, but at the same time, this is a high school equivalency test,” Saleses said. “We don’t want to ask more of

them. We don’t want to ask less of them.”

The 1,425 test takers learned in emails last week that they have passed all or a portion of the test that they had previously failed, Saleses said. Some now have passed the whole test, while others passed individual subjects of the four that make up the whole test: language arts (reading and writing), science, math and social studies.

“I think (lowering the passing score) is a smart move, I really do,” said Doug House, director of the Transitional Workforce Department at Columbus State Community College. GED Testing Service raised the bar too high too quickly, House said.

The evolution of the test “went not from A to B, it went from A to Z,” he said.

While the change will likely motivate more people to get their equivalency certificate, the test is still too expensive for many people,

said Kat Yamaguchi, director of adult and community education at the Godman Guild in Columbus.

GED Testing Service, owned by giant education media corporation Pearson, tripled the cost to \$120 to take all four parts in 2014. Ohio will pay \$80 of that for first-time test takers, but repeat takers pay full price. Yamaguchi knows of one student who had to pay to take the test five times, and would have passed under the previous cut-off score.

“I think the unfortunate thing is Pearson is not going to give refunds to anyone,” Yamaguchi said.

After the new test was implemented, Ohio’s GED passage rate in 2014 plunged to 49 percent for those who completed all parts of the test, down from rates in the mid-70s or low-80s for the years before the change. Last year, 66 percent passed.

bbush@dispatch.com
@ReporterBush